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DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

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SUBJECT: NIGERIAN VIEWS ON AFRICOM: WE'VE GOT OUR WORK CUT
OUT FOR US

Classified By: Charge d'Affairs Robert Gribbin for reasons 1.4. (b & d)

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¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Articles in the September 14 and 17 editions of "This Day" quote unnamed Nigerian Defense establishment sources as being fundamentally opposed to AFRICOM. Privately, Embassy military contacts report far less hostility to the idea. Both the articles and Embassy contacts, however, display a high level of ignorance of AFRICOM's fundamental makeup and purpose, and highlight the need for more USG outreach on the subject. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Respected Nigerian daily "This Day" ran a September 14 article quoting unnamed Defense sources as saying that the GON, in conjunction with AU and ECOWAS leadership, was working to "block any move by US to establish a base in the Gulf (of Guinea)... or the ECOWAS region." Repeating the GON's oft-quoted line that last week's terrorism-related Warden Message was merely a clumsy U.S. attempt at justifying AFRICOM, the unnamed sources said that Nigeria would not succumb to such "blackmail" and "back-door" efforts to "establish a base in the Gulf." While the September 17 edition of "This Day" appears to have back-pedaled somewhat, quoting other unnamed officials as saying that Nigeria would be unable to frustrate U.S. plans due to its own lack of preparedness, it still reinforced existing misinformation about U.S. policy and plans for Africa, and even created some new misinformation, such as U.S. submarine bases in Sao Tome & Principe, Angola, and Guinea. (Note: ECOWAS contacts describe any maneuvering on their part to block AFRICOM as "nonsense.")

¶3. (C) Privately, MOD staff are less resistant to AFRICOM; however, they still show a disappointing lack of understanding of both its central purpose and its staffing. Air Vice Marshal Christian Marizu from the Chief of Defense Staff's Policy and Planning Committee said that the Nigerian Defense establishment is divided over whether AFRICOM will be good for Nigeria, the region, and the continent, but that those against it are in the minority. He said that objections to AFRICOM stem from fears of colonialism, "Big Brother meddling", and the types of problems that occur around large U.S. bases "like those in the Philippines -- rapes and the pursuit of the dollar." He also said that important questions remained unanswered, such as how AFRICOM will interact with Africa's regional conferences, and how U.S. efforts to disrupt growing Chinese hegemony over African resources would affect Nigeria. While subsequently relieved

by Poloff's corrections of his misunderstandings of AFRICOM's basic make-up and function, it is distressing that a frequent USG interlocutor and general officer involved with policy and planning still believes that AFRICOM will be a large base designed to contain the Chinese.

¶4. (C) Comment: As a GON representative to the upcoming Airlie House Conference, Marizu will have the opportunity to clarify his questions and misapprehensions. Judging from media and other regional reporting, however, we just are not making our case for AFRICOM, and need to increase our efforts accordingly. End Comment.

¶5. (C) DATT Comment: Despite numerous attempts to educate senior Nigerian Defense officials, the slow transition between governments, as well as a large senior level change in Defense and service headquarters, has hindered information flow. AFRICOM is a constant subject of concern, with comments based more on ignorance than fact. End comment.
GRIBBIN